



The DCC
*Drama in Schools
Programme*
2003 - 2013

Delivered by
the Arts Office
of Dublin City
Council

Facilitated by
Sarah Fitzgibbon
and Joanna Parkes.



Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council

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Illustrations by Maeve Clancy

Introduction

In December 2002, ten teachers met for the first time in the Dublin Writer's Museum, Parnell Square, to attend a preliminary Drama workshop organised by the Arts Office of Dublin City Council; a workshop which would focus upon exploring and complementing the newly devised drama curriculum in a practical way.

Subsequently in 2003, these same teachers participated in a six month drama training programme, designed by Irma Grothuis, and became the first group to participate, in what was to become an annual Drama in Schools Programme delivered by the Arts Office. Over the next ten years, this initiative, would actively seek to explore the potential of drama as a core element in a cross-curricular approach to teaching in mainstream primary schools throughout Dublin City.

Since 2003, thirty four teachers from mainstream schools have participated in DCC's Drama in Schools Programme with approximately eight hundred and seventy five children working directly with the programme's educational drama facilitators Joanna Parkes and Sarah Fitzgibbon, (indirectly the programme has catered for many more).

Between 2011- 2013 the programme adjusted its focus and began to work with both teachers and students attending the ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) units of eight schools.

The following narrative is hopefully a concise and informative description of what was created and achieved over a ten year period. All feedback has consistently indicated that the programme's structure and content has worked well for participating teachers, so we think it's worth presenting.

The hands-on element of the Drama in Schools Programme is available in a second document (the Drama Toolbox) that can be downloaded from our website www.dcc.ie.

Aims of the DCC Drama in Schools Programme

Over its ten year journey, the DCC Drama in Schools Programme was very clear about what it wanted to achieve, which was the following:

- To explore the advantages and potential of using Drama within the context of an integrated curriculum, with a focus on the SPHE curriculum.
- To identify the needs of teachers who were beginning to implement the Drama Curriculum and to devise a training programme that would address those needs and where appropriate, to provide practical learning examples.
- To identify and explore the most effective way of engaging the participating teacher's class by working directly in the classroom.
- To broaden the frame of reference for teachers by providing them with the opportunity to observe other Drama practitioners and teachers at work.
- To introduce a broad range of teachers to the benefits and potential of confidently delivering the drama curriculum with their class group.
- To create a multiplier effect within schools.
- To create and develop a network of teachers who would support and encourage each other in the delivery of the drama curriculum.
- To encourage some teachers to overcome the potential fears that they expressed in relation to the delivery of drama in the classroom.
- To provide teachers with the opportunity to witness best practice within the reality of the classroom context.
- To create aspirational standards for teachers in relation to the appropriate delivery of drama in the classroom.
- To provide primary school children throughout Dublin City with the opportunity to successfully and actively participate in Drama.

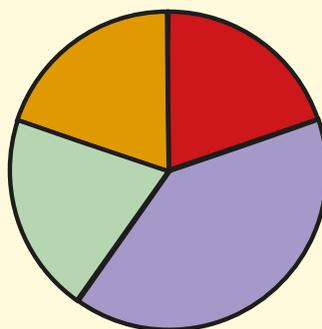
Programme Structure

From 2003 - 2013 the programme sought to provide teachers with the opportunity to work with highly experienced Educational Drama practitioners directly in their classrooms, to explore connections between the Drama Curriculum and an integrated approach to cross-curricular teaching, with a particular focus on SPHE- Myself and the wider world.

During this time it provided fourteen weeks of structured support, learning and guidance to participating teachers and between 2011 - 2013 participating teachers received ten weeks of structured support and guidance.

Since the programme's establishment, an on-going system of feedback and review with programme participants was been conducted by the DCC Arts Office. Over the years the programme was honed and adapted appropriately in accordance with the information that was received from participating schools and teachers.

Overwhelmingly, feedback to the programme throughout the years has been extremely positive from both participating teachers and their schools. Largely this can be attributed to the commitment and professionalism of the programme's facilitators Joanna Parkes and Sarah Fitzgibbon and to the clear supportive structure that has been implemented since the programme's inception.



- Group workshops for teachers
- Facilitator working with the class
- Team Teaching
- Mentoring

2003 - 2011 / Working in Mainstream Schools

Over the years the programme gathered both written and verbal responses from its participating teachers during the time of their participation.

Evaluation took place in several ways:

Written feedback from both teachers and participating schools

Observational feedback from the programmes facilitators

Verbal feedback from teachers both individually and collectively

Feedback over the years was very consistent from the vast majority of teachers in their analysis as to why the DCC Drama in Schools programme worked so well for each of them. Almost unanimously teachers have identified the following factors as pivotal to supporting their successful participation in the programme.

Why did the programme work so well for teachers?

1. The Six Week Drama Scheme

No matter what their level of drama experience all teachers cited the learning that they received around the development of a six week drama scheme for their class as being the most significant outcome for them in relation to their participation on the Programme.

The majority of teachers felt that they could competently deliver a drama scheme after participating in the programme. Some teachers went on to explain that it took another few months of delivering pre-prepared schemes before they felt confident about amending existing schemes or creating their own.

My motivation for participation in the programme was really to develop my ability in delivering drama schemes of six weeks and to pass this knowledge on to colleagues.... Once Jo showed me how I could combine the different elements of drama and story into a six week scheme, I became much more confident with delivering the drama curriculum.

Participating Teacher

2. A structured approach

The programme was broken into four very clear strands. Teachers cited the clear structure of the programme as being a strong factor in determining such a positive outcome for each of them.

These programme strands were as follows:

A: Experiential Drama and Group Support

Teachers were given the opportunity to experience workshops with the programmes drama facilitators at specific intervals during the life of the programme. This

provided them with an opportunity also to share, feedback with each other, and potentially troubleshoot challenges that were emerging during their drama sessions within the classroom.

B: Modelling and Observation

The facilitator would deliver a specific drama scheme with the teacher's class group for six weeks. The teacher would observe each session delivered, and engage in a debrief with the facilitator after it had concluded.

I don't know if I would have had the confidence without being shown.

Participating Teacher

C: Team Teaching

The Facilitator and Teacher prepared and delivered a drama scheme for a number of weeks together.

D: Distance Mentoring

The teacher designed and delivered her first scheme and received structured support and advice from her designated facilitator.

3. Resources

In 2008 Dublin City Council provided the research opportunity for facilitators Joanna Parkes and Sarah Fitzgibbon to write their books *Step by Step Together*.

[http://www.nayd.ie/resources/publications/#Step By Step Together: Drama and Development Education in the Primary Classroom](http://www.nayd.ie/resources/publications/#Step%20By%20Step%20Together%3A%20Drama%20and%20Development%20Education%20in%20the%20Primary%20Classroom)

[http://www.nayd.ie/resources/publications/#Step By Step Educational Drama: A Cross-Curricular Use of Drama in the Classroom](http://www.nayd.ie/resources/publications/#Step%20By%20Step%20Educational%20Drama%3A%20A%20Cross-Curricular%20Use%20of%20Drama%20in%20the%20Classroom)

Subsequent to the programmes conclusion these resources provided a very clear roadmap for teachers to

support their implementation of the six week drama scheme model.

4. Content

In addition to proficiently delivering the drama strand of the primary school curriculum the programme also sought to incorporate a broad range of subjects particularly topics of SPSE and SPHE, ensuring that the teacher was meeting a broad range of curriculum requirements.

Teachers clearly cited both their satisfaction and occasionally their surprise that a drama programme could so competently encompass so many different strands of the primary school curriculum.

It was evident that her work was very well researched and linked in with the primary school curriculum.

Participating teacher

5. Complying with the Aims of the Primary School Curriculum

The appropriate delivery of the programme by its facilitators ensured that the overarching aims of a learner centred primary school curriculum were appropriately met. These aims are as follows:

- to enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual.
- to enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society.
- to prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning.

A significant number of participating teachers expressed satisfaction that the programme complimented the aims of the primary school curriculum.

6. Discovering the broader range of intelligences and talents within individual children

Teachers identified that confidently delivering longer term drama schemes enabled them to observe students in a way that was both creative and tailored to meet the needs of their specific class.

Again and again teachers stated that they were pleasantly surprised and delighted at seeing their pupils display a broad range of abilities and talents that they had not previously witnessed within the more formal classroom context.

I loved seeing the quieter children participate. When acting like a different person they could become more confident. They really came out of themselves; drama is brilliant for children that do have difficulty in this way.

Drama is very beneficial to children as they are problem solving all the time and coming together to offer solutions to the challenges presented.

7. Supporting the development of their professional drama teaching practice.

Teachers strongly felt that the programme had given them the confidence and ability to meet the requirements of the drama curriculum and to further develop their practice beyond the resources and schemes that the programme provided.

Confidence grows over time and as a teacher I find that you are constantly developing your practice by adapting and adding to the drama schemes in place to suit the needs of the class.

2011 -2013 / Working in Special Needs Schools and ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) Units in Mainstream Schools

In 2011 the DCC Drama in Schools programme sought to examine the question of whether it would be possible to apply its successful mainstream programme to a dedicated context of Special Needs. The programme's facilitators worked with four dedicated Special Needs Schools in the Dublin area during the period of 2011-2012. During this time it became apparent to the programme partners that an accurate assessment of the therapeutic benefits of the programme to participants would be challenging as it was exigent to accurately identify the extent to which the programme being delivered was therapy and to what extent it was in fact Drama in Education. It was felt that the programme would have more efficacy if it was placed in the ASD units in mainstream schools rather than in Special Needs Schools.

In 2012 -2013 the programme once again adapted its methodologies and began to explore how it could most effectively support teachers who were working with children in ASD Units in mainstream schools to confidently deliver the drama curriculum.

The programme's facilitators worked closely with participating teachers to design and deliver work that would best meet the needs of participating children. Two Drama Schemes The Great Adventure of the Dragon's Egg and the Maiden Voyage of the Young Astronauts Academy were developed in consultation with the teachers.

It is from the exposure of both children and teachers to the drama schemes the Great Adventure of the Dragon's Egg and the Maiden voyage of the Young Astronauts Academy that the following conclusions were determined.

Important factors identified by the Teachers and Facilitators working through Drama in the ASD Units of Mainstream Schools

To facilitate the smooth progression of the drama programme from week to week it was necessary to work through stories via chapters. Teachers and facilitators found that all of the groups struggled with an unresolved story from week to week. However, they discovered that conceptually the children got the idea that they could have finished a chapter within an overall story. This made it easier for them to de-role and leave the drama and settle back into other classroom activities.

Providing props and costumes was a very good way for children to be introduced into the stories and roles that were adopting as they helped to support the child's engagement. E.g.: Use of the Egg as a prop in the drama scheme the Adventure of the Great Dragon's Egg.

Post Drama, teachers showing photos of each session to the children proved to be a useful tool as it helped them to recall the session and their engagement within it.

Using a physical object was a great way to gel the group. E.g. Warming the dragon's egg to keep the tiny dragon inside it alive.

A number of children demonstrated echolalic behaviour i.e.: Behaviour reminiscent of what the child has seen in a video game or on television but applying it within a drama context. Where appropriate and possible this was facilitated and incorporated into the drama scheme.

Props worked well in all settings

For children who participated in the drama process and were non-verbal, the story being explored needs to be a physical story

Creating a map as part of the process e.g. A map of the journey or the kingdom worked very well with all groups.

Providing visual stimuli for the children at the beginning of a drama scheme proved to be very important.

It was agreed that in certain situations props couldn't be too real or participants couldn't engage. E.g. A piece of green material was more effective as a dragon than an actual dragon puppet.

Teachers felt it was useful when certain tasks from the wider curriculum could be incorporated into the work. E.g. Balance/ Co-ordination or exploring Feelings: e.g. Understanding the need to keep the dragon's egg warm.

Basic drama methodologies that can be used in most contexts: e.g. Interviewing characters worked well with their group.

Familiar tasks worked very well. E.g. Camping: Zipping yourself into your sleeping bag

Important Factors identified by the teachers and facilitators working in dedicated Special Needs Schools

Visual Stimuli was extremely important. Many children had difficulty in picturing and trying to imagine certain scenarios which reinforced the need for visual stimuli during the sessions. Teachers expressed a desire to see more use of visual aids and props as they were very useful in motivating the group and providing a context for them.

When working with children who presented with profound learning disabilities, the teacher/facilitator followed a theme rather than a narrative.

For Children with profound learning disabilities, sessions needed to be really animated, enthusiastic and tactile

Repetition was extremely important. Participating children loved repetition each week. Eg. The song "I love to fly off in my rocket" was sung each week.

Many of the needs and findings that were identified by participating teachers in the ASD units mirrored the needs and findings of the teachers on the programme who delivered Drama in mainstream classes within the education system.

Common strands articulated by the teachers in ASD Units that were also mirrored by teachers working in mainstream schools included:

- Teachers' perspectives on their students' participation were in many cases very similar whether they were mainstream or working in ASD units. For example: seeing children in a new light, children participating in drama feeling part of a team. These comments were made by both sets of teachers during the life of the programme.
- Some feedback from the teachers in ASD units also mirrored that of their mainstream colleagues: e.g. finding ideas for drama can be hard. The implementation of the drama curriculum without a clear lesson plan can be challenging.
- Certain simple drama methodologies that work well with almost any mainstream group were also identified as working well within the context of the ASD units

Outcomes

Participating Teachers who worked in the ASD units of mainstream schools identified the following observations for both themselves and their students:

Gaps in some children's general comprehension became more apparent to the teacher through doing drama

At times it could prove to be challenging to deliver drama schemes in some venues, due to additional requirements that could be placed on teachers in ASD units. E.g. Some teachers had to leave the room frequently which made the sessions more challenging for participants and facilitator.

It was articulated that the problem solving strand of drama and the ability of the children to engage in it gave the teacher a lot to think about.

When presented with certain themes and characters e.g. Farmers, some children could find it difficult to engage with the process.

Some children participating in drama provided their teacher with the opportunity of seeing them in a new light.

In one particular case a child had a very complicated behavioural problem. The child presented behaviour that was extremely challenging to other children in the class. The participating teacher identified that drama was very useful during this time and provided the other children with a sense of escape.

Comprehension of some children significantly varied within the process, not understanding that they were engaging in make-believe and that the dragon in the drama was not real or its eggs were not really hatching.

Teachers felt that in some cases that though the child mightn't have always understood what was going on, that was OK once the child felt part of a group.

In cases whereby a child demonstrated an imaginative ability it became evident that they really engaged with the programme.

Important Note: It became evident through discussion with participating teachers that it was not that the type of drama scheme being provided to children attending the ASD units in mainstream schools that needed to be completely bespoke (drama schemes always need to be adapted to meet the interests of any group) but rather it was the emphasis placed on particular elements within the Drama Scheme that defined the programme as

being unique to catering for the needs of children who attended the ASD units in mainstream schools.

One of the groups worked with in 2011 did not attend an ASD unit within a mainstream school as they had more profound physical and intellectual disabilities. These children needed much greater physical and intellectual support, and so followed a different curriculum and

learning process. The focus of the drama scheme for them had much greater emphasis on creating a tactile, sensory experience. A journey to space was the focus of one of their drama schemes but for them they visited a number of planets which each offered a different tactile experience – e.g. a soft, warm planet, a cold, windy planet, a hot, volcanic planet, an underwater planet with bubbles.

Participating Teachers who worked in Schools attended by children with profound physical and intellectual disabilities identified the following additional outcomes for both themselves and their students

For Children with profound learning disabilities, sessions needed to be really animated, enthusiastic and tactile. Engaging their senses was important – giving them things to touch, feel with their fingers, on their cheeks, different smells, sounds, different sensations on the skin.

Repetition was extremely important. The beginning and end of each session was the same each week and children enjoyed the repetition and knowing what was coming next.

Music and songs worked well as part of the drama process. If the children couldn't sing themselves they enjoyed hearing the songs and could sometimes join in with a percussion instrument.

Profile of the Drama in Schools Facilitators

Drama in Schools Facilitator Sarah Fitzgibbon

In 2011 Sarah Fitzgibbon was approached by the newly reconstituted Community and Education Dept. in the Abbey Theatre under Phil Kingston, to become the department's educational consultant and architect of their Priming The Canon programme. 'Me mollser' by Ali White; the first piece of this programme, was also directed by Sarah.

With over twenty years of experience in the theatre arts and education sectors, Sarah has had the pleasure to work in a variety of roles with all of the three theatre-in-education companies, Graffiti, Team and Replay. She was the artistic director of DYT as well as a volunteer there for 10 years and continues her commitment to youth participation through her involvement in The Base, a youth arts and multi-media venue in Ballyfermot Dublin 10.

For the last 10 years Sarah Fitzgibbon has collaborated closely with Joanna Parkes in supporting primary school teachers to enact the drama curriculum with the generous support of the Dublin City Council's Arts Office. Their educational drama programme supported the development of the Step by Step series of classroom resources published by the National Association for Youth Drama, which are widely used in the primary sector. More recently, this programme has focused on the use of process drama within ASD units in mainstream schools.

Sarah regularly contributes to teacher training in St. Patrick's College and has through the Abbey Theatre, been engaged on the PALS pilot where she hopes to support teachers in their performance arts engagement at secondary level. Sarah is currently leading out the pilot of the Abbey Theatres Junior Cert. Short Course: Theatre Making and Citizenship in partnership with Larkin Community College and Maire O'Higgins.

Sarah has also had the pleasure of working with Puca Puppets, Barabbas, the company and her playlet Jackie's Day for early years is going to enjoy its 12th revival this year with Graffiti Theatre Company.

Drama in Schools Facilitator Joanna Parkes

Joanna Parkes is an experienced Educational Drama practitioner who has worked nationally and internationally on a wide range of projects in educational and community settings. Since 2004 her work has focused primarily on Educational Drama projects in Primary Schools working with children and teachers in the classroom, designing and implementing schemes of work, delivering teacher training and producing practical, accessible books and resources for teachers. As well as teaching in mainstream classrooms she has experience of teaching drama in ASD units (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) and with children with profound physical and intellectual disabilities in an Educational Development Centre. As part of her freelance work she worked on a number of Arts and Health projects, including a number of Intergenerational projects and other projects with older people living at home or in residential care and most recently she worked with a group of older deaf women in a residential home in Dublin.

In addition to working in schools her third level teaching experience includes lecturing in **Marino Institute of Education** on a part-time basis from 2011. From 2009 to 2012 she taught a course in **Applied Drama & Community** to Junior and Senior Sophister students at the Drama Department in **Trinity College Dublin (TCD)**. She has also lectured at **Froebel College and St Patrick's College of Education**.

She was Program Officer for the **Outreach/Education department** at **The Abbey Theatre** (Ireland's National Theatre) for several years, with responsibility for working with older people and community groups.

She has published three resource books for teachers; two were co-written with Sarah FitzGibbon and published by **NAYD** (National Association for Youth Drama). The first '**Step By Step Educational Drama**' was published in November 2006. It has been very successful with teachers and has gone to re-print three times. Their second collaboration, '**Step By Step Together**' explores the links between Drama and Global Education and was published in the autumn 2009.

A Teacher's Pack called '**Together We Play, Learn and Understand**', uses drama to explore the Rights of the Child including specific ideas for working with children learning English as an additional language at schools. (Published in 2007 by Health Promotion HSE North)

